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Carter Orders Quick Action to Improve U.S. Intelligence

Dissatisfaction With CIA's Failure to Warn of Iran Turmoil Prompts Directive to Turner, Brzezinski

BY ROBERT C. TOTH

WASHINGTON—President Carter, declaring himself "not satisfied" with U.S. intelligence reporting that failed to warn of the turmoil in Iran, has ordered his three top national security aides to improve the political analysis reaching his desk "as soon as possible."

Beyond the immediate case of Iran, the larger issue behind the President's criticism is whether the intelligence failure was an isolated incident or a dangerous example of the sad state of the Central Intelligence Agency today, following successive scandals, personnel firings and the appointment of five directors in as many years.

If the CIA has been weakened, there would be implications critical to the U.S. national security.

Carter's handwritten directive, dated Nov. 11, went to Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance, national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and CIA Director Stansfield Turner. But, implicitly, its criticism was aimed mainly at Turner, who has primary responsibility for collecting and analyzing political intelligence.

It was a top-secret 23-page CIA assessment of the Iranian situation in mid-August that, until two weeks ago, resulted in the sanguine attitude of the U.S. government—now so embarrassing to the White House—towards events in that key oil-producing state.

Among the CIA's conclusions, made well after the rioting had begun there, was that "Iran is not in a revolutionary or even prerevolutionary situation."

"Those who are in opposition, both violent and nonviolent, do not have the capability to be more than troublesome," another line in the CIA document said. "There is dissatisfaction with the shah's tight control of the political process, but this does not threaten the government," a third line read.

These assessments were obviously wrong, at least several scholars and private business consultants had warned in August and even earlier of impending chaos in Iran.

"In February, it was clear things were getting out of hand," one such consultant said in an interview this week. "The upper classes were taking money out of the country. But our

embassy there insisted there would be no trouble.

"In August, it was far worse," he continued. "Senior civil servants told me openly the shah must go, and were saying it in groups, not just singly. But our people (U.S. officials) were just taking handouts from the Iranian court and listening only to the Savak (Iranian secret police)," he said.

These warnings are said to have reached Brzezinski but he either chose to accept the CIA assessment or was unable to challenge it. However, a more important point is that astute private observers were reaching conclusions opposite to those of the CIA with the expenditure of far less money and without the services of 1,700 political analysts.

The State Department, with its huge embassy in Tehran and an Intelligence and Research division, also has been faulted. Its Iranian assessment did not differ significantly from the CIA's, and blame has been leveled at U.S. Ambassador William Sullivan for, among other things, his public assurance in June that the spreading riots were no cause for alarm.

Apparently the embassy had little contact with religious and student groups in Iran. However, such infiltration is primarily the work of the CIA, as is the job of providing overall national intelligence estimates of the many critical regions and countries of the world like Iran.

"We say publicly that there is no evidence the Soviets are exploiting the situation in Iran," one knowledgeable source complained, "but we have no real reason for saying that if we have no sources inside the Communist Party or in the religious or student groups there."

Some officials believe that if the CIA's assessments of August or earlier had been different the Administration could have counseled the shah to go slow in expanding civil liberties.